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THE LETTERS OF GOETHE'S MOTHER

The art of writing letters is doubtless falling rapidly into neglect, if, indeed, it is not already a lost art. The scraps of news and small gossip by means of which we keep our friends informed of our whereabouts, provided we do not conveniently substitute a picture post-card, are certainly not worthy of the name of letters. For we have not time to write memoirs, as was the fashion a century ago, to chronicle moods and impressions in a form calculated to engage the sympathetic interest of our correspondents. Modern facilities for travel and modern means of electro-verbal communication, but perhaps most of all, the modern newspaper, have sounded the death-knell of the letter as a vehicle of self-expression.

Nowhere, perhaps, has a charming personality revealed itself more fully and lovably than in the letters of Goethe's mother, Frau Rat. Sparkling with an irrepressible good-humor and wit; heavy, sometimes, with a burden of tenderest human sympathy; reverent in their absolute faith in a wise and loving God, and always pervaded by an unquenchable optimism; these letters, despite their faltering and uncertain orthography, are in the best sense of the word works of art. And only when one has read the four hundred or more letters from her pen that have been preserved and published, can one adequately appreciate her influence, both by way of heredity and training, upon the character and the habits of mind of her illustrious son.

She was a mere slip of a girl seventeen years old when she was married to Johann Kaspar Goethe, a man twenty-one years her senior. He was a broadly educated and cultivated jurist, already the proud possessor of the title of "Rat," who had inherited a sufficient fortune to enable him to live as a retired gentleman. Thus he had the necessary leisure to superintend most intimately the education of his children; and we have the earnest assurance in Goethe's reminiscences that the father did not neglect his self-appointed task. While his nature was not without lovable traits, his manner was stern and severe, and it was fortunate for young Wolfgang and his sister Cornelia that

the natural buoyancy and cheerfulness of their "Mütterchen," who was in fact more nearly of an age with her children than with her husband, kept their childhood and youth sunny and sweet in a house which must otherwise have been pervaded with the gloom of an all-too-severe discipline. Nevertheless, to represent Goethe's father simply as a pedantic domestic tyrant, as so many biographers have done, is exceedingly unjust and inaccurate.

It is noteworthy, but not strange, that Goethe nowhere raised a literary monument to his mother. Not that he fails to invest more than one creation of his poet's fancy with many of her charms and virtues; but he never made her the subject of a single lyric, nor even gave us a description of her in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The few pages of his own with which he prefaces Bettina's letters in the brief fragment *Aristeia der Mutter* seem almost perfunctory in their dispassionate reflectiveness and surely cannot be taken to represent his habitual mode of thought or feeling concerning his mother. Indeed, her memory is to the poet the Holy of Holies which in filial reverence he feared to enter. Doubtless the same feeling possessed Goethe as that which inspired Mörike's lines:

Lo! not one of my songs proclaims thy praises, oh mother,
 For to extol thee, in truth, I am both too rich and too poor.
 Thou, a Song yet unsung, in my heart art closely enfolded,
 Silent to all without, but to me giving sweet consolation,
 When the heart wearily turns from the world, and in solitude ponders
 All the blessings of peace that Heaven to me hath vouchsafed.

Practically no letters bearing an earlier date than 1775 have been preserved, and probably few were written. With the removal of her "Hätschelhans"—for so she loved to call him—to Weimar in 1775 and the loss of her only daughter Cornelia in 1777, the most serenely happy period of her life came to an end. The next five years were years of self-sacrificing devotion to her invalid and rapidly aging husband, who was in body and mind fast approaching his dissolution. "It is well with him," she writes to her friend the Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia, under date of June 11th, 1782, a few weeks after his decease, "it is well with him, and I would pray God to spare even my worst enemy such a life as he has had these last two years."

She now removed from the great house in the narrow "Hirschgraben" and took an apartment from the windows of which she could watch the busy life of the city. Here she spent the remaining twenty-six years of her life in quiet serenity and happiness, surrounded by a host of devoted friends. Her delight in the theater amounted almost to a passion, and she developed an altogether remarkable critical acumen in regard to matters literary and dramatic. With fullest appreciation and sympathy she followed the career of her brilliant son in Weimar, always as intensely concerned about his physical welfare as she was interested in his literary enterprises and immensely proud of his successes. His occasional visits to Frankfort—1793, 1797—were the red-letter days of her declining years. Happily free from illness or care during all this time, she remained to the last her same cheerful self; and when she was overtaken at the age of seventy-eight by her last illness, she proceeded with the utmost composure to give minute instructions for her burial. She even insisted that there should be plenty of raisins in the cake that was to be served to the mourners, for she had always abhorred stingy cakes, she said, and wanted none at her funeral.

In quoting from the letters of Frau Rat the translator never ceases to regret that no impression can be given of her quaintly picturesque orthography. "It was all the fault of my teacher," she jestingly explains. She could spell with tolerable correctness if she set her mind upon it, but when she was in a hurry or allowed her thoughts to ramble along, her orthography, too, follows its own delightful kaleidoscopic way. It is a very short and common word indeed for which she has not the most amazing variety of spellings. But these variations are not without some significance; to a certain extent they seem to reflect the particular mood or frame of mind in which she happened to be. Thus her use of capitals is often very expressive,—as for instance when in addition to the substantives she capitalizes an adjective: "Many Thanks for your Dear Letter. . . . I can write no more with this Wretched Pen, save that I remain your faithful Mother Goethe." In the main she spells phonetically, though not consistently so, and in consequence much of her Frankfort dialect is transferred to and visualized upon the printed

page. *Thier* becomes *Thir*, *Wien* becomes *Winn*; *Schiff*, however, is spelled *Schief*; *Subjekte* she changes to *Supjette*, while *Lotterie* is rendered comically grotesque in the form *Looteri*. Her single apology for her faulty spelling is appended as a postscript to one of her letters to Christiane: "Dasz das Bustawiren [Buchstabieren] und gerade Schreiben nicht zu meinen sonstigen Talenten gehört—müszet Ihr verzeihen—der Fehler lage am Schulmeister." (You must pardon the circumstance that spelling and writing evenly do not belong to my accomplishments,—the trouble was with the schoolmaster.)

The brief series of extracts from the letters of Frau Rat may fittingly begin with one or two from her letters to children, for these show at once her rare faculty for entering sympathetically into all their joys and sorrows. When Goethe arrived at Weimar, Fritz von Stein, the favorite son of Charlotte von Stein, was two years of age. Goethe at once became deeply attached to the boy, superintended his instruction, and in 1783 actually took him to live with him at his own house. Her letters give ample evidence that Goethe's mother shared this affection for Wolfgang's little friend. She wrote to him frequently, sent him no end of gifts and remembrances, and in 1785 arranged to have him come to Frankfort on a visit.

In September of the previous year, when she had not yet seen him, she writes: "My dear Son,—I thank you most heartily for your description of your dear self, in whom I am so much interested; and above all I am glad to see that you know your good points as well as your faults. Bravo, my son! that's the only way to become noble, great and useful to humanity; a man who doesn't know or care to know his faults becomes intolerant and intolerable, vain and pretentious,—no one likes him, even though he were the greatest genius; I've seen many instances of it. But the good that is in us we should be aware of too, that's just as necessary, just as useful. A man who doesn't know his worth or his powers and therefore has no faith in himself, is a simpleton who never gains a firm footing but depends forever on leading-strings and remains *in seculum seculorum* a child. Continue in this good way, my son, and your dear parents will have reason to bless the day of your birth. It is a

sincere evidence of your love and friendship that you desire an exact description of my person, so I am sending you herewith two silhouettes,—to be sure, in one of them the nose is rather too prominent and the other makes me look younger than I am, although on the whole it is very like me. I am fairly tall and rather stoutish, have brown eyes and hair, and fancy I might impersonate the mother of Prince Hamlet not so badly. Many persons assert that no one could fail to recognize Goethe as my son. I can't quite see that, although there must be something in it, since so many people have made the statement. Orderliness and repose are the chief traits of my character, consequently I do everything right at once, off-hand, beginning always with the least agreeable; and following the wise counsel of our friend Wieland, I swallow the devil right down, without looking him over. Afterwards, when the ruffles and wrinkles are all smoothed out again, I defy anyone to surpass me in good-humor. Now, my dear son, you must come and see all this for yourself and I'll do my very best to give you a good time." That he had the promised good time when he came the following year, her letter of October 20th, 1785, witnessed: "My dear Cherubim! I was delighted to hear of your return home and to receive your detailed account of the journey. But above all it rejoiced my heart to know that my dear Fritz holds me in pleasant remembrance." She recounts in detail their usual daily programme, how they breakfasted, submitted to the ministrations of hairdressers, then decked themselves out in their best finery for dinner, how he would then go to the fair for the afternoon and meet her again at the theater in the evening, from which he would escort her home, where the day's frolic would regularly be brought to a close with a "duodrama" in the vestibule, one of the maids, "the fat Elizabeth managing the lights" while the other two, Greineld and Marie, represented the audience,—all this with a spontaneity and delight which assure us that she had just as good a time as did her young cavalier. In the same letter she indulges her love for parody in a clever little imitation of the long-winded titles given to some of the popular works of fiction of the time. "Herewith I am sending you a true and authentic Description, vouched for and undersigned by Starred and

gartered Gentlemen, of the Balloon, which, after having first Exploded, finally did ascend amid Music and Jubilation, to the great Delight of all Christendom; most Diverting to read and edifying to Contemplate." In December of the same year she writes: "Dear Son,—How good of you that you still think of me! Nor have I and my friends forgotten you, indeed we shall never forget you. We have three public concerts a week this winter, but I am not attending them, at least I have not taken a subscription. The principal one, which is given on Friday, is too stiff and formal to suit me, Monday's concert is too poor, and that on Wednesday bores me to death, a diversion which I can enjoy much more comfortably in my own room. Everything in my little household is just as it was when you saw it; but since old Sol is pleased to lie abed somewhat longer at this time of year, I also am pleased to conform to his habits and rarely emerge from the feathers before half-past eight. Nor do I see why I should impose any hardship upon myself,—rest is my delight, and since God has given me this blessing I gratefully enjoy it."

Some of Frau Rat's most charming letters to children were written to her little granddaughter, Louise Schlosser. April 27th, 1784: "I was delighted with your letter. What a splendid little fellow Edward must be! But won't it be fun when he is able to run about in the garden with you and your two sisters. Of course you'll have to take good care and not let him fall on his nose!" She is never happier than when she is able in some practical way to instil in the minds of children her own gospel of the beauty of sweetness and light. "I am sending you herewith the embroideries you wanted," she writes to Louise, September 14th, 1786, "and hope the materials will prove to your liking. Your sisters will be very happy to see how much you love them and desire to give them pleasure. If at any time you wish to make some little gift on the sly, in order to gladden the heart of someone, you need only write to me and I will gladly send you everything you require for it." It goes without saying that no Christmas or birthdays were allowed to pass without a special remembrance for each one; but neither did she forget to impress upon the minds of the children the sig-

nificance of giving and receiving gifts. To illustrate this, her letter of January 13th, 1785, may be translated in full: "My dear Grandchildren!—I am so glad that my Christmas gift gave you so much pleasure,—but I had heard all through the year from your dear mother what good, clever girls you had been. Continue so,—indeed, as you grow bigger try to become even more so. Obey your dear parents, who, you may be sure, have your welfare earnestly at heart. And how beautiful it is, when in return for all the trouble of your bringing up, your parents, your grandmother and all your other friends have reason to delight in you. I am looking forward to the arrival of that work-bag. I shall always take it along when I go visiting, and shall tell about the cleverness and industry of my Louise! Now you must teach your brother Edward to walk, so that when Spring comes he may be able to run about in the garden with you,—won't that be fun! If I were only with you, I would teach you all sorts of games, bird-market, potz schimper potz schemper, and many others. They are great fun for children, and you know how your grandmother loves to be merry and to make others merry. Well, if God will keep you all in health and happiness throughout this year, it will rejoice the heart of Your faithfully devoted Grandmother Goethe." She firmly believes in the words of Brother Martin in *Götz*, and quotes them in a letter to Fritz von Stein: "Cheerfulness is the mother of all virtues, says Götz von Berlichingen, and truly he is right. When one is happy and contented oneself, one wishes to see all men similarly happy and cheerful, and does one's best to make them so."

But she emphatically disclaims any ability to train children. When twelve years later a baby is born to Louise, Frau Rat's letter of felicitation begins with the words of Rinkart's grand old hymn of praise:

"Nun danket all Gott, mit Herzen, Mund und Händen,
Der grosse Dinge tut."

"Verily," she continues, "He has again manifested Himself as the One whose mercy endureth forever, bless His holy Name, amen!—The child will increase in stature, wisdom and favor with God and man. But your great-grand-

mother can't contribute in the least to this good end,—the distance is too great. And you may well be glad of it, dear John George Edward, for your great-grandmother can't bring up children, indeed she has not the slightest aptitude for it; she humors them in everything when they laugh and are pleasant, and trounces them when they cry or pout, without ever asking why they are crying or laughing. But I will love you and delight in you and remember you often before God—this I can and most certainly will do." We may assume, however, that her methods were more rational than she claims, for they seem to have been altogether successful. In a letter of the year 1798 to her grandson August von Goethe she says: "I know what it means to have joy of one's children. Your dear father never, *never* caused me annoyance or grief, wherefore God has blessed him, has caused him to rise above many others and has given him great fame." Her whole theory and practice of pedagogy seems to have been summed up in the words of Lessing's Klosterbruder: "Kinder brauchen Liebe," and that she gave to them from the fullness of her heart.

In a letter to Frau von Stein, November, 1785, Goethe's mother has given us an excellent characterization of herself: "I love my fellow-beings dearly, and that, I know, is appreciated by young and old alike; I live my life in the most unpretentious way, which also pleases all the sons and daughters of Eve. Nor do I set myself up as anyone's moral critic, but rather seek to discover the good side of people, leaving the bad to Him who created us and who best knows how to smooth off the rough corners; and I find that this mode of life keeps me hale, happy and contented." Characteristic of her imperturbable serenity is a letter to her friend, Dr. Zimmermann, who had been the physician of her daughter Cornelia in Emmendingen. The doctor's own ailment to which she refers was hypochondria, which was so repugnant to her that she avers she could not bring herself to write the word: "February 16th, 1776. My dear Doctor!—Your kind letter gave me much pleasure in part. But—what I wrote you in jest seems to be not entirely without foundation: you are not well. Believe me, I am seriously alarmed about you. Good Heavens! how comes such an excellent, clever,

delightful, splendid, dear, good man by this confounded [she writes *Verdammt*, with a capital] illness? Why should it afflict just the most useful men? I know a lot of rascals who ought to be sick, for they are not of the slightest use to the world, whether they are asleep or awake. Dear friend! will you take the advice of a woman who, it is true, does not know the first thing about the science of medicine, but who has had the opportunity of close association with many people who were similarly afflicted. I have always found that a change of surroundings was the most effective cure. It is not necessary to travel a hundred miles, but you must get out of your four walls, into the open air, out into the country, among people you like. Then hurl all his black and gloomy thoughts right back at the devil,—this was Doctor Luther's proven remedy which he recommended to his friend. Now do not disdain, I beg of you, to follow the advice of a woman; it will not compromise your great learning in the least, for did not an ass once give wise counsel to a prophet!"

It would seem that scarcely a single letter came from her pen that does not strike a note of fullest trust in God as the guide of her and her children's destinies; and whether the occasion be one of rejoicing or of sorrow, she accepts both as loving visitations of Providence. The Bible is her stronghold. On the marriage of her granddaughter in 1794 Frau Rat writes: "My dear Louise! Now do you *see* how God rewards good children even in this life! For is not your marriage an almost miraculous dispensation of Providence; and to think that it has been so ordered that your dear parents and brothers and sisters are to go with you! That would not have been so easy if the war had not been carried into our country. And so I would have you remember this as long as you live: the God who is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham can turn to our good the very things which with our purblind eyes we regard as misfortunes." But again, when the grief-stricken parents mourn the death of their only daughter, Frau Rat writes to her friend Lavater: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. New, living, present witnesses are we, now that our Cornelia, our only daughter, is in

her grave; and indeed wholly unexpectedly, like a bolt from the blue. My heart was as if crushed; but the thought, 'shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' sustained me, so that I did not sink under my grief. Without a belief, firm as a rock, in God—the God who numbers the hairs of our heads, without whom no sparrow falls, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, who is not gone on a journey, who knows the thought of my heart even before it is formed, who hears me without my having need to cut myself with knives and lancets; who in a word is Love—without faith in Him it would have been impossible to bear such a thing. To be sure, human nature asserts itself; Paul says—No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous; but it is one thing to grieve, and another to be discontented with God's leading and to be as those who have no hope. But we who know that beyond the grave dwells immortality, and that our life, which is but as a span, may also soon be at an end—truly it becomes us to kiss the hand that chastens us and say, though with a thousand tears: 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

The last decade of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth were troubled years for the cities on the western border of Germany. Lack of space will not permit my giving even a brief connected survey of the history of that period, although such a setting is almost indispensable for an adequate appreciation of her vivid epistolary accounts of the happenings of those terrible times. Long sieges, fierce bombardments,—in that of the 13th and 14th of July, 1796, over 150 houses in Frankfort were destroyed by fire—large contributions of war, of which Frau Rat had to bear her considerable share, and almost constant quarterings of soldiers in her house,—these were some of the afflictions that tested the mettle of the good woman. But she was proud of the conduct of her fair city of Frankfort, of the courage and loyalty of its citizens, at a time when half the population of the Rhine provinces was fleeing in craven terror; and above all, to quote her own words—"Faith in God! that is what makes my heart glad and my countenance cheerful. I rejoice in life while yet its lamp doth glow, I seek

no thorns, but rather snatch its little pleasures in passing; when I come to lowly doors, I stoop and pass under. If I can lift the stone from my path, I do so; if it is too heavy, I go around it,—and so I find in each day a modicum of happiness.” Her account of the bombardment of July, 1796, is here given in full: “My dear Son,—Doubtless the newspapers have informed you concerning the present situation of affairs in your native city, but since it is altogether certain that they have not published Frau Aja’s [her own] diary, and I know that you are much concerned to know how I survived this experience, I will write you a little account of it. I was not the least afraid of the Frenchmen and their entry into the city; I was certain they would do no plundering, so why should I pack my things? I left them as they were, and was quite unconcerned. As a matter of fact, no one believed for a moment that the imperial troops would make a stand here, and their doing so was sheer folly, as the consequences clearly showed. But having decided upon this course, things began to be serious. In times of peace the house in which I live is one of the pleasantest in the city, but so much more terrible in days such as these just now past. The imperial commandant lived in the house opposite, and now I could see the entire spectacle, the Frenchmen with blindfolded eyes, our burgomaster,—everybody in mortal fear of what was to transpire. Toward the evening of the 12th the bombardment began. We all sat in the lower room of our landlord, and when the firing slackened somewhat, I went to bed. Toward two in the morning it began again, so up we jumped out of our beds, and now I began to pack in earnest, not for fear of the Frenchmen, but of fire. In a few hours we had everything in the cellar, all excepting the iron chest, which was too heavy for us, so I sent for Major Schuler’s orderly and another strong man, who succeeded in getting it into the cellar. Up to that moment I had been quite calm, but now such terrifying reports began to come in—how this man or that (all of them people whom I knew) had been slain by the howitzers, or had had an arm or a leg shot off, that I began to be afraid, and decided to go away. Not far, of course, only to escape the bombardment; but no conveyance was to be had at any price. At last I heard that a family living near us was going to Offen-

bach, so I asked them to take me along, to which they very politely consented. I'm not one of your timid souls, but this night of terror which I spent in peace and quite with Mamma la Roche in Offenbach, might have cost me my life, or at least have injured my health if I had remained in Frankfort. Throughout the 12th, 13th, and 14th I remained in my city of refuge; then on the morning of the 15th came the news that the capitulation of the city had been concluded, and that there was no danger to life and limb to be feared, but that one should return at once, as the French would occupy the city on the 16th, when the gates would be closed. Under these circumstances I would not have remained in Offenbach under any considerations, because, for one thing, I might have been considered a fugitive [*emigriert*] and secondly because my beautiful rooms, now entirely vacant (I had taken my maids with me), might have been taken from me. But now Holland was again in distress! No carriage was to be found,—until our old friend Hans Andre took pity on me and gave me his neat little coach, and soon I was back again in my house 'At the Golden Fountain,' thanking God with all my heart for the preservation of my life and dwelling. Naturally, the prospect of a greater misfortune obscures the lesser: as soon as the cannonading ceased it seemed like heaven, and we regarded the Frenchmen as the rescuers of our possessions and the protectors of our homes, for if they had been so inclined they could have razed every house. But, instead, they hitched their horses to the pumps to help in quenching the conflagration. Grant us peace, oh God! Amen!—Farewell! Greet your household and ever love Your faithful mother Goethe."

Frau Rat was intensely German and intensely patriotic. But the source of her patriotic enthusiasm lay in her pride in Frankfort as a free imperial city.

If she could have seen the integrity of the empire preserved and the position of Frankfort as a "freie Reichsstadt" maintained, little would she have cared as to who occupied the left or the right bank of the Rhine. But when in 1806 the wasted form of the ancient empire was finally interred, she says; "I feel as though I had a friend who is very ill. The doctors have

given him up, and we are assured that he must die. But in spite of all this certainty, it is a shock to us when the news comes that he is dead. So it is with me, and with the whole city. Yesterday for the first time the Emperor and Empire were omitted from the prayers at church; illuminations, fireworks and all that, but not a sign of joy; these things all seem like funeral processions to us!" Why not? Had she not witnessed the pomp and splendor of five imperial coronations in her beloved Frankfort? And yet, how ready she is to make the best of things! "Perhaps things will be better than we expect," she writes, "let us try the new coat on, perhaps it will not fit so badly, and let us make an end of lamentations."

But the great joyous fact of her life was her Wolfgang. Everything that concerned him in the least degree, physically, mentally, or spiritually, was to her a matter of the most vital importance. How she rejoices with him when she hears from him of his arrival in Rome, 1786, and how clearly she divines the significance of his journey. "Dear Son!—An apparition from the lower world could not have astonished me more than did your letter from Rome. I wanted to shout for joy that the wish which you have cherished in your heart from your earliest youth has now been fulfilled. Such a journey cannot fail to make a man like you happy and contented for all the rest of his life, a man of your knowledge and your fine appreciation of all that is good and beautiful; nor will you alone enjoy its benefits, but all those as well who have the good fortune to come within your sphere of activity." His works become her constant companions as soon as he places them in her hands. Performances of *Götz* are her special delight. "The eighth of May (1786) was a happy day for me as well as for Goethe's friends, for *Götz von Berlichingen* was performed. The appearance of Brother Martin—*Götz* before the councillors of Heilbronn—the bullet-moulding—the battle with the imperial troops and the death-scene of Weisslingen and of *Götz* were tremendously effective. The question, 'Whence come you, learned sir?' and the answer, 'From Frankfort on the Main,' called forth such jubilation and applause that it was a delight to hear." When his *Wilhelm Meister* arrives, she can scarcely find words to

express her gratitude and her joy: "Thank you a thousand times for your *Wilhelm*! And what a treat it was for me! I felt thirty years younger—and could see you and the other boys making your preparations for your puppet theatricals. If I could only express my sentiments adequately, you would be happy indeed to know what a day of delight you have given your mother." And again, on receipt of a handsome copy of *Hermann and Dorothea* which Christiane sent her, she writes: "Dear Son!—Kindly express to my dear daughter my heartiest thanks for the splendid copy of *Hermann and Dorothea*. The work deserves such a beautiful garb, for it is an incomparable masterpiece. I am carrying it around like a cat her kittens; next Sunday I shall take it over to Stock's,—I can just imagine how they will crow with delight!"

Nowhere, not even in her letters to Goethe, is the spontaneity of her thought and expression more clearly shown than in her correspondence with the patroness of her son, her own dear friend the Duchess Anna Amalia. Once the somewhat more formal introductory phrases are out of the way, the tone of her letter is invested with a cordiality that is nothing short of contagious. They have the most wonderful diversity of things to talk about. Frau Rat sends musicians to Weimar with letters of introduction to the Duchess, and the latter in turn commissions her to do some shopping for her in Frankfort. She seems to be particularly interested in hearing about the annual fair in that commercial center. One of Frau Rat's letters of the year 1781, in which she reviews the theatrical season in her city, concludes as follows: "This letter is a veritable quodlibet, and for that the confounded fair is to blame. Frankfort is all in a whirl over it, until it fairly makes one's head spin. Among the many distinguished visitors is also the famous Duchess of Kingston; I'm sure she must weigh at least three hundred pounds. To-day Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Heaven only knows who else, are to be murdered—decently and in order, you know, according to programme. I imagine it will be real jolly, so I intend to go." . . . "Your Highness is so gracious as to enquire what I am doing?" she writes in another letter of about the same time, "Well, by Jupiter! as little as I can, and

that little as badly as possible. But how could it be otherwise? Alone, and left to my own devices,—when the springs are diverted or clogged, the deepest well must run dry. To be sure, I am constantly trying to dig fresh ones, but they either have no water or they are muddy, and either case is bad enough, you will admit. Now I might continue this noble allegory *ad infinitum*. I might tell you, for instance, that in order not to die of thirst I am just now taking mineral water, which ordinarily is only for invalids, etc. Indeed, many fine things might be brought in here, but wit,—well, wit always strikes me as being like a draught of air: it cools you, no doubt, but it is very apt to give you a stiff neck. So then, all jesting aside, every pleasure that I now wish to enjoy I have to seek among strangers, outside of my own house, for here it is as quiet and deserted as a graveyard. Formerly, it was altogether different;—but who would fret because it is not always full moon and because the sun does not warm us as kindly now as in July! Only by using well the present and never thinking that it might be otherwise, does one succeed best in getting through the world; and the getting through is after all the chief thing."

Many years after the death of Goethe's mother, Zelter having asked to see one of her letters, Goethe sent him one and accompanied it with these words: "Herewith I enclose one of my mother's letters, in accordance with your wish. In it, as in every line she wrote, there is expressed the character of a woman who lived a strong and hearty life in the Old Testament fear of the Lord and full of trust in the unchangeable God of the family and of the nation."

WILHELM BRAUN.

Barnard College, Columbia University